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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000111

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#)  
SUBJECT: QATAR ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT: IRAQ GETS TO "NO"  
REF: STATE 3120

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Zebari confirmed to us January 15 Iraq's decision to decline Qatar's invitation to a proposed January 16 Emergency Arab League Summit on Gaza but the decision was crafted in such a way as to leave a legalistic out. Zebari (and other officials) described internal debates within the GOI as Iraq found itself in the middle of the tense and divided region-wide response to the Qatari initiative. Iraqi domestic political calculations figure high in Vice President Hashimi's drive to attend a Doha meeting. Worries about reactions of Egypt and Saudi Arabia balanced against those calculations and led the Iraqis to see-saw January 14-15. As this cable was being transmitted we heard from Hashimi's chief of staff that Hashimi would attend a meeting of some Arab leaders in Doha while President Talabani will go to Kuwait for the January 16 summit there. End Summary.

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IRAQIS FEEL CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE  
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¶2. (C) An exhausted looking FM Zebari told Poloffs that his role January 14 was "mediating between two summits, Kuwait and Doha, and between the Prime Minister and the Presidency Council." He said he had fielded calls (from the Egyptian and Emirati foreign ministers among others on January 14 afternoon) and worked the phones until 0100, a culmination of a full day of diplomacy in the region and within the GOI. Zebari said that since the December 31 Arab League (AL) Emergency Ministerial on Gaza, GOI policy -- supported by PM Maliki -- had been to support the Egyptian Gaza initiative and resist calls for an emergency Arab League summit without first holding another ministerial-level meeting to consider the question.

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THE SUNNI ARAB VICE PRESIDENT ACTS  
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¶3. (C) In that context, Zebari said had spoken with his Qatari counterpart several times the previous day to reconfirm Iraq's position and state that any discussion on Gaza could take place at the already scheduled January 19-20 Kuwait Economic Summit. President Talabani supported that approach, he said, but Vice President Hashimi called him repeatedly pressing for a reversal of the decision -- something, Zebari said, he resisted. Then, later in the day, while meeting with EU Ambassadors to commemorate the new Czech EU Presidency, Zebari was told Hashimi had called PM Maliki, told Maliki he would represent Iraq in Doha, and had sent a written message to Amir of Qatar confirming his attendance. According to Zebari, the Qataris then used Hashimi's letter to convince the UAE that a quorum had been attained -- prompting the UAE to agree provisionally to attend as well.



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WHAT IS MOTIVATING HASHIMI ?  
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¶4. (C) Over dinner January 14 Hashimi chief of staff Saif ad-Din Rahman defended Hashimi's push to attend the summit in Doha as the only possible response to allegedly growing pressure on the Iraqi street. PMIN noted that Iraqi attendance would set back efforts to boost ties with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait while doing nothing to actually help the Palestinians. PMIN wondered what signs of growing pressure Hashimi had received, and Rahman said simply the Iraqi Islamic Party offices in Iraq were reporting ever growing dissatisfaction among the citizenry. The government, he claimed, could not appear disinterested. Separately, Vice Qhe claimed, could not appear disinterested. Separately, Vice President Abdel Mehdi's foreign policy advisor, Fareed Yasin, cautioned PMIN January 14 evening that emotion were high in Iraq after the TV coverage of Gaza. It would be difficult, he opined, for Iraq not to attend a summit.

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THE APPEAL AND THE MECHANISM  
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¶5. (C) Upon learning of Hashimi's action, Zebari said he called his Qatari counterpart to make clear that VP Hashimi's "acceptance" was not the final word and did not represent the official GOI response. After consultations among the senior Iraqi leadership, they agreed to hold an Executive Council meeting at 1930 on January 14. (The Executive Council has the Prime Minister, the President and the two Vice Presidents. Given the limits on the Prime Minister's

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immediate ability to compel the Presidency to follow his instruction, the Executive Council was the best means to develop a unified stance among the Iraqi leaders.) Prime Minister Maliki provided his thoughts but did not actually attend this meeting, according to Zebari. Before the meeting started, Egyptian President Mubarak called President Talabani to press him not to go to Doha. Further discussion among Talabani and Vice Presidents Hashimi and Abdel Mehdi produced a decision which

-- said Iraq would not attend a Doha summit if Iraq's presence established the necessary quorum;

-- said Iraq would attend a Doha summit if the Qataris had a quorum without Iraq;

-- said Iraq would attend an informal meeting in Doha if called for consultations.

-- said Iraq would accept allocating part the Kuwait Summit time to the issue of Gaza. (The Kuwaitis, Zebari said, are supportive of this approach.)

¶6. (C) Following this decision, Zebari instructed Iraq's Ambassador to the Arab League to officially convey in writing Iraq's decision not to go to Qatar. He said he subsequently informed UAE FM Abdullah bin Zayid of the GOI decision which then prompted the UAE also to retract its earlier provisional decision to go to Doha.

¶7. (C) Summing things up, Zebari said "Iraq has no interest in a divided Arab world. Those countries that made clear they were not going to Doha (i.e. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait), are the countries that are most important to us." (When PMIN spoke to Deputy Prime Minister Salih before the 1930 Executive Council meeting January 14, Salih himself volunteered that Iraq had not interest in souring relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Salih later said that Talabani used this argument to good effect with Vice President Abdel Mehdi in the Executive Council meeting.)



18. (C) As this cable was being transmitted Hashimi aide Rahman called to say that Hashimi and he were boarding an aircraft for Doha for a meeting there after all. We understand from Talabani's staff that he will go to Kuwait as planned for the January 16 meeting there.

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